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ABSTRACT

The cultural diversity of Australia and the status of multicultural education in Australian schools are examined. The first part of the paper discusses Australia as one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. The author points out that Australia's delay in establishing a concept of multicultural education results from the fact that Australians have historically resented newcomers; migrants and refugees have been expected to learn English, to accept Australian values and standards, and to assimilate into the Australian way of life. The second part of the paper details initiatives in multicultural education since it received official recognition in the late 1970s. The country's multicultural educational objectives, which have been widely accepted by teachers but disappointingly implemented, are discussed. An Australian primary school cultural awareness program is described as an illustration of one successful innovation. The paper concludes by examining four areas in multicultural education that need reassessment. (RM)

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Multicultural/Multiethnic Education in Four Multicultural Societies.

AUSTRALIA

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AUSTRALIA

The Land

Australia, an island continent, is one of the world's oldest land masses. Its western shoreline is washed by the Indian Ocean while the east coast is lapped by the Coral and Tasman Seas of the South Pacific Ocean. The country's area of 7,682,300 Km^2 (1) is almost as large as the 48 contiguous mainland states of U.S.A. Nearly 40% of the land lies north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Australia is also the flattest of the continents with an average elevation of 300m, compared to the world figure of 700m. Only 5% of the continent is more than 600m above sea level. (2) The climate ranges from tropical to temperate and is less subject to extremes than regions of comparable size because of the moderating effects of the surrounding oceans and an absence of extensive high land masses.

Early History

The country's first inhabitants were the Aborigines, a dark-skinned race of hunters and gatherers who arrived, it is thought, some 40,000 years ago by way of the land bridge which then linked Australia with Asia. They were attracted to the fertile and well-watered country of the coastal fringe, especially in the south and east of the continent. At the time of European settlement the Aboriginal population is believed to have been 300,000 and by this stage they had developed a distinctive culture which was finely tuned to the environment.

During the 17th century a number of European explorers, principally Portugese and Dutch, sailed to the north-western and southern sections of the continent.(3) It was not until

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1770 that a British navigator, Captain James Cook, sighted the east coast of Australia. Although his account of the voyage aroused considerable interest in Britain, no attempt to colonise the land was made until the American Colonies were lost in the War of Independence. On 13 May 1787 a fleet of 11 ships under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip sailed from England with 1030 people on board, 736 of them convicts. The initial settlement at Botany Bay was abandoned after one week and on 26 January 1788 the fleet sailed north and established the settlement at Port Jackson, the site today of the country's largest city, Sydney. The white settlement had begun.

The People

Today, Australia's population is 15.5 million,(4) double the number since the end of World War II. This increase largely reflects the influx of new settlers from an extensive immigration programme. One person in five was born overseas and a further one in five has at least one parent born overseas.(5) Almost 4 million migrants from 120 countries have settled in Australia since 1945.(6) Britain is the largest single source of immigration with Europe, Asia and Oceania the major regional sources.

In both absolute terms and in relation to population, Australia is one of the leading resettlement countries for refugees. By the end of 1982, 400,000 refugees and displaced persons had settled in Australia since World War II. They included 170,000 from Europe as a result of the war and its aftermath; 14,000 Hungarians who fled during the uprising of 1956; 5700 Czechoslovakians after Dubceck's assassination in 1968; 70,000 Indo-Chinese since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and 13,600 East Europeans who have sought asylum from that area.(7)

Despite the oft-promoted image of the country and its people by the Australian mass media, Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. How it reacts to this achievement and how it responds in terms of education are the themes of this paper.

The Migrant Experience

While the white settlement of Australia is almost 200 years long, the country's ethnic composition has only changed dramatically since 1945. By the end of World War II the population was 7 million, made up of people whose descendants had come from the British Isles and who comprised 97% of that total. The country had been through the traumatic experience of having, for the first and only time, its shores attacked by hostile forces: the Japanese bombed Darwin and torpedoed a Sydney Harbour ferry. To those who survived the various theatres of war, the loss of life was minute but the damage to the nation's psyche was shattering. To Australians it was a sudden awakening that the protective umbrella of Britain no longer extended to the Pacific. The capitulation of Singapore destroyed forever the long-cherished comfort that membership of the British Empire was sufficient to ensure security from an external menace. The Prime Minister, Mr. J.B. Chifley, articulated a widely-held belief that the most effective means of survival was to increase the nation's population for otherwise:

> "We will not be able to justify before the world our retention of such a great country." (8)

However, such a natural increase was unlikely given the limitations of the population size despite the enticing cry of Australia's first Minister for Immigration, Mr. A.A. Calwell, who decreed that Australia must:

> "populate or perish."(9)

Realistic assessments showed that the need for an immigration policy based on pragmatism and humanitarian ideals was long overdue. Not that in developing such a policy was a multicultural nation envisaged. The cornerstone of this policy was to be the migrant from Britain:

> "It is my hope that for every foreign migrant there will be ten from the United Kingdom." proclaimed Calwell. (10)

Seven years later his successor to the portfolio, Mr. Harold Holt, saw no reason to disagree:

> "Australia, in accepting a balanced intake of other European people, can still build a truly British nation on this side of the world." (11)

While there was strong community support for such principles, the reality was that Australia's immigration policies proved to be far more flexible than envisaged, as evidenced by the cultural pluralism of the nation today. Yet how did the so-called "ordinary Australian" react to the changing structure of society? To answer this question it is necessary to analyse the historical and social factors that have made the ethnic experience in Australia an uncomfortable one.

Many historians and social commentators argue that Australia still suffers from an identity crisis. Its traditional roots are British but its orientation is more towards the United States and, geographically, the country is a logical extension of South East Asia. The northern city of Darwin is closer to Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, than it is to Canberra, the seat of government. The development of Australia has largely been determined by British institutions and British social mores. For all but the past few decades the country has been viewed as a homogeneous one: almost all people conversed in English (and

with little regional variation). How could a country nearly the size of continental USA be so uniform?

The eminent historian, Russel Ward in The Australian Legend,[12] attempted to explain this question. Ward argued that beliefs held by the dominant section of the 19th century population, the white Anglo-Saxon, protestant male, still permeate Australian society. The twin ideals of mateship and egalitarianism were great unifying factors. He saw a challenge, albeit an unwilling one, to these ideals as the basis of Australia's xenophobia, a fear which gained impetus during the gold rush decade of the 1850s. That challenge materialised with the arrival of Chinese indentured labour. This group of meek, industrious people was an affront to the twin male-held ethos. The Chinese worked for a pittance; 'invaded' claims after white diggers had vacated them, but of more importance, they spoke a different language and they were a different colour. Violence does not figure prominently in Australia's history: the country has witnessed no revolution nor has it been involved in a civil war, yet the goldfields were scenes of violent racial clashes.[13] One result of the gold rush era was that various state legislatures passed restrictive laws aimed at curtailing the migration of Asian labour. When the federation of Australian states came into being in 1901, one of the early Acts passed by the newly constituted Australian Government became known as the "White Australia Policy". Based on the U.S. "Chinese Exclusion Act" (1884), it prohibited the migration of coloured peoples to the country and to Australia's shame it endured for nearly fifty years.

It is reasonable to claim that while the "White Australia Policy" institutionalised resentment to coloured migration, the logical outcome was that this resentment was applied across the board. The greatest period of migration to Australia occurred during the 1960s and the reaction to this was perceptively analysed by Jean Martin.[14] Martin

identified what she saw as a fundamental set of beliefs held by the majority of Australians on the ways in which migrants could and should be incorporated into Australian society. Martin termed these beliefs the 'Ideology of Settlement' and this ideology is underpinned by six essential elements. It should be added that they are not necessarily exclusive to Australia.

The ideology is:

(i) Australians are democratic and individualistic, free of class prejudice and essentially generous-hearted and open minded....to anyone who shares these central values.

(ii) Australia is the 'lucky country' and the one salient characteristic that all immigrants have in common is that they are lucky to be here.

(iii) With a little education of public opinion and a little extra support from voluntary organizations like the 'Good Neighbour Council', the existing Australian social structure <u>can</u> and <u>will</u> incorporate newcomers without undergoing radical change itself.

(iv) National groupings within ethnic minorities are unnecessary and a potential threat to the smooth incorporation of migrants into our society.

(v) The process of incorporation involves the individual migrant assimilating into the Australian way of life and the success of

this assimilation depends, fundamentally, not on structures or on government policies but on the goodwill of individual migrants and individual Australians.

(vi) It would be contrary to the prevailing egalitarian values and detrimental to the assimilation of migrants for them to be given any unique privileges or consideration of any kind.

I would like to add that Australia is unashamedly a monolingual country. The prevailing attitude is that a migrant, if he or she wishes to succeed quickly, should learn English as soon as possible.(15) One final impediment is that the role of the mass media in Australia has been one of consistent stereotyping of migrants, invariably influenced by the ideology of settlement.

Multicultural Education Initiatives

I believe that these factors partly explain the delay in establishing the concept of multicultural education in Australia. The urbanization of the country proved to be a further disincentive to the large and bureaucratic state departments of education. Australia has experienced considerable chain migration, particularly from Southern Europe, and these people have congregated in identifiable inner-city areas (for example, Leichhardt and Newtown in Sydney are predominately Italian and Greek settlements). Such a concentration has resulted in their educational needs being submerged in a state-wide system. These state bodies, although ultimately financed by the national government, jealously guard their prerogatives in many areas, particularly in education. Each state has its own education department centred in the capital city and while most have established regional centres of administration, the co-ordination and development of curriculum policy remains centralized.

It was not until the late 1970s that multicultural education in Australia recieved official recognition. The largest state, New South Wales, ennunciated its objectives in 1978 and in so doing adopted this philosophical stance:

> "In a multicultural society each person has the right to cultural integrity, to a positive self-image, and to an understanding and a respect for differences. Not only should each person be exposed to positive feelings about his or her own heritage, but must experience like feelings about the heritage of others."(16)

Five years later New South Wales issued its Multicultural Education Policy Statement and Support Documents.(17) The aims of this policy are representative of those published by other states:(18)

> "The aims of multicultural education encompass the provision of educational experiences which will develop in all children:
>
> (a) an understanding and appreciation that Australia has been multicultural in nature throughout its history, both before and after European colonization,
>
> (b) an awareness of the contribution which people of many different cultural backgrounds have made and are making to Australia,
>
> (c) intercultural understanding through the consideration of attitudes, beliefs and values related to multiculturalism,

(d) behaviour that fosters interethnic harmony, and

(e) an enhanced sense of personal worth through an acceptance and appreciation not only of their Australian national identity but also of their specific Australian ethnic identity in the context of a multicultural society."

It is fair to say that these aims have been widely accepted by teachers but their implementation has been, to say the least, disappointing. What has taken place is that cultures have been studied in both isolation and superficiality.(19) While this, in my experience is the norm, it would be wrong to assume that little is being achieved within the system. Primary (elementary) schools vary significantly in the role and status that they afford to social studies. Within social studies, multicultural education is a relatively new field but the example of Richmond West Primary School(20) illustrates what an innovative and dedicated staff can achieve.

Richmond West Primary School: Cultural Awareness Programme

In 1982 the staff at Richmond West Primary School decided that a programme was needed which would make the children aware and appreciative of the diversity of cultures represented within the school and the wider community.

In June of that year a meeting of the school parent population was held. Interpreters were present so that parents could comfortably discuss issues in their own language. The aim of the meeting was to look at the needs of the children in the school and to explore ways of developing school programs to meet these needs. One of the needs established, the need for a greater appreciation of each other's cultures, was the basis for this program. Over 60 parents attended this meeting, representing a wide range of cultures, i.e., Turkish, Vietnamese, Timorese, Yugoslav and Australian. Many parents have expressed their enthusiasm

Program Development and Funding

The school then approached the Richmond Community Education Centre for assistance in program development. Cavell Zangalis, the Multicultural Project Officer, offered to work as a member of the project team. The program leader sought to make maximum use of the resources available in the local area, i.e., R.C.E.C., the Ecumenical Migration Centre, performing groups, Child Migrant Education Services personnel, parents and parent associations are but a few of the resources which have been tapped to date.

It was decided that Grades 3, 4 and 5 would be involved in the first year of the program's running. The program was to take place every Tuesday afternoon. Nine themes were decided upon for the year, four countries (Greece, Vietnam, Timor and Turkey) and five cross-cultural activity themes (Easter, Folklore, Food, Festivals and Migration).

The criteria for selection of country themes was based on the ethnic composition of the school population and the availability of resources and material suitable for use with children. "Greece" was chosen as the first theme due to the wealth of material available.

Cross-cultural themes were selected for every second theme so that other cultures represented in the school could also be explored, and for children to be aware of common elements of culture.

The nine teachers in the grades 3, 4, 5 area plus all specialists and teacher-aides were timetabled to be included in each Tuesday's sessions, so that there would be at least two teachers per grade per session.

Further ideas were gathered and a proposal for 1983 was planned, called "The Cultural Awareness Program." Submissions were made to Supplementary Grants and the Victorian Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education (VACMME), $4,245 and $3,050 were granted respectively. A teacher-aide was employed for one day per week through the VACMME grant.

A Multicultural Resource Room has been established within the school. The Room houses all the materials purchased for the program as well as other materials on loan from the Richmond Community Education Centre. Parents and Community Groups have open access to this room.

Program Administration

A group of teachers, parents and community representatives volunteered to administer and monitor the project. In-Service programs were held before each theme commenced to allow all teachers involved to familiarize themselves with the material. Monthly meetings are held to evaluate the progress of the program.

The Program so far

The first theme, Folklore, ran for five weeks, which meant that each grade had 10 x 1 hour sessions. Special activities included - 2 plays by New Theatre Daytime; Cooking (making Jewish Latkes); Singing (Greek songs); Unicef games, and learning Chilean dances. The other sessions were classroom teacher initiated e.g., choosing a folktale and developing their own art/craft or drama follow-up activity.

The response so far from both teachers and children has been positive and enthusiastic. Many teachers are extending the themes, integrating them where possible, into other

areas of the Curriculum - Language, Art, Physical Education, Nutrition, and Music. Planning sessions for future themes are held well in advance so that organisation and program running are smooth and uncomplicated.

Although the program is in its infancy, it has generated a sense of excitement within the school, and all involved are looking forward to the challenges of future themes.

Even so, such innovation is just the beginning for the desirability of expanding multicultural education in Australian schools is impeded by the very system which espouses the cause. Schools here, indeed in most western societies, are not agents for change, rather they pass on values and traditions which are those of the dominant culture and in Australia that dominant culture is the white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class. Teachers are upwardly mobile members of this class and more likely than not have followed the traditional career pattern of 13 years schooling before college/university and then employment in the schools. The outside world passes by and as such they remain largely unaffected. Moreover, teacher trainees in tertiary institutions do not reflect the ethnic diversity of Australian society.

The Future

What does the future hold for multicultural education? I suggest that there are four areas in need for reassessment:

(i) There should be an end to the "lip-service" currently paid to multicultural education. The first step should be to change the focus of schools whereby they come to reflect the diverse nature of Australian society; where individuals are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of cultures and where

students are provided with cultural and ethnic alternatives to the dominant, Anglo-centred curricula. As James Banks[21] argues, students should be given skills, attitudes and knowledge to enable them to operate within their culture, the mainstream culture and other ethnic cultures.

(ii) As a concomitant of (i), there is a desperate need for a coherent bi-lingual policy. The current practice is to use L^1 only as a transition to L^2 (English). The emphasis should be on the maintenance of L^1 while learning English. As well, English-speaking students should have the opportunity to develop a second language proficiency. And that second language should be relevant: Italian, Greek, Spanish, Japanese or Indonesian. At present, the major languages studied are French and German.

(iii) Multicultural education needs to be expanded across the whole school curriculum. It is currently located firmly in the social studies, however, it is valid across all subjects.

(iv) Finally, teacher-training institutions must be at the forefront of these initiatives and the task should not be confined to trainees either. Educators have a duty to a much wider field: to teachers, parents and students, and to the general public.

The task will not be easy because of the social and historical factors discussed earlier in this paper. Experience suggests that educational change will be gradual but there is hope that a more tolerant society is emerging and I believe that the development of multicultural education will enhance this trend. There is, however, much to be done.

NOTES

(1) W. Hill (ed.) Australia Handbook 1983-84, Australian Information Service, Department of Administrative Services, Canberra, 1983, p. 7.

(2) ibid.

(3) "Terra Incognita" was the name given to a great south land by the Egyptian cartographer, Ptolemy. The following explored various areas before colonisation:

Torres (1606) explored the Strait which today bears his name and separates Australia from Papua-New Guinea;

Willem Janszoon (1606) Gulf of Carpentaria;

Dirk Hartog (1616) landed on the west coast at Shark Bay;

Abel Tasman (1642) discovered and named Van Diemen's Land which today is the smallest state, Tasmania; and

Willem Vlamingh (1696) charted the Swan River, site of Perth, capital of Western Australia.

(4) Australian Bureau of Statistics, June, 1984.

(5) W. Hill (ed.) op. cit. p. 16.

(6) ibid.

(7) W. Hill, (ed.) op.cit. p. 20.

(8) L.F. Crisp, Ben Chifley, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961, p. 319.

(9) A.A. Calwell, "How Many Australians Tomorrow?" Australian Senate Debates, December 1945, No. 185, p. 6294.

Calwell argued that it was time to again "enoble motherhood" for Australia must either:

> "populate the country or sooner or later be overun by Asiatic peoples".

Cited in J. Wilton and R. Bosworth, Old Worlds and New Australia, Melbourne: Penguin, 1984, p. 7.

(10) ibid. p. 11.

(11) H. Holt, Digest: Report of the Third Australian Citizenship Convention, Canberra, 1952, p. 10.

In Wilton and Bosworth, op. cit. p. 17.

Thus was cemented a long-standing bi-partisan approach on immigration policy which lasted until earlier this year when the Liberal-National Country Party Coalition, in opposition and doing badly in public opinion surveys, seized upon the inflammatory and ill-informed comments of historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey. Blainey argued that the government's immigration policy was both "anti-British" and leading to the "Asianization of Australia". The opposition spokesperson on immigration Mr. Michael Hodgman, advocated a "more balanced programme" by increasing the number of British and Northern Europeans.

(12) R.B. Ward, The Australian Legend, Oxford University Press, 1958.

This book traces the historical origins and development of the Australian national mystique. It argues that Australia developed its peculiar and dynamic character among the workers in the Australian pastoral industry of the 19th century. Ward claims that this group had "an influence, completely disproportionate to its numerical and economic strength, on the attitudes of the whole Australian community." It is a seminal work.

(13) A good deal of this violence was blamed on gold prospectors from the Californian fields. Certainly two particularly appalling incidents occurred in Bendigo (1854) and the Buckland River (1857) on 4 July. The Lambing Flat (NSW) riot of 1861 lasted for some days and began on 30 June.

R.B. Ward op. cit. p. 133.

(14) Jean Martin, "Migrants: Equality and Ideology." Meredith Memorial Lecture, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1972.

(15) As illustrated in the best selling book by "Nino Culotta" (John O'Grady) They're a Weird Mob, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1957.

Purportedly the autobiography of a Northern Italian migrant, the story tells of the assimilation of "Nino" into Australian society. So successful is this process that "Nino" concludes his story with some indispensible advice:

> "All that is needed is the will to learn....hop in and learn. I've heard parents in shops talking to kids in their homeland language, and the kids translating into English....this is disgraceful. Those parents should be bloody ashamed of themselves."

J. Wilton and R. Bosworth op. cit. p. 25.

(16) New South Wales Department of Education,
"Multicultural Education: A Consultative Document"
Sydney, 1978, p. 1.

(17) New South Wales Department of Education,
Multicultural Education Policy Statement, Sydney, 1983.

Support Documents:

Multicultural Perspectives to Curriculum

Intercultural Education

Community Language Education

Ethnic Studies

English as a Second Language Education

(18) For example,

Queensland

- "an appreciation of the multicultural reality of Australian society and its history;
- an awareness of the contribution that different ethnic groups, including one's own, can continue to make to the development of Australia;
- attitudes, beliefs and values appropriate for living in a multicultural society;
- an identity and sense of personal worth as a member of a multicultural society; and
- an individual's identity and sense of personal worth as a member of a specific ethnic group."

Department of Education, Queensland,
Education for a Multicultural Society: Curriculum Guidelines for Primary Schools.
Brisbane, 1983, p. 1.

Tasmania

"To prepare students for life in a multicultural society, schools must:

- educate all students in a way that takes account of the diversity of our society and fosters intercultural empathy and interaction;
- provide for the special education needs of immigrant students and help them function effectively in school and society;
- support all students in the maintenance of their cultural traditions and language;
- acknowledge the contribution that people of all cultures have made and are continuing to make to Australian society."

Education Department, Tasmania,
Multicultural Approaches in Tasmanian Education
K-10 Curriculum Statement.
Hobart, 1983, p. 17.

(19) Our largest non-British group of migrants, the Italians, for example, often as not would receive the "Pasta and Pavarotti" treatment. This approach usually includes a brief study of the country: its location, traditions, customs, food and clothing. The usual conclusion is an "Italian Day" in which food is sampled and music played.

(20) I am indebted to Peter Carins of the Child Migrant Services of the Victorian Department of Education, Melbourne, for his assistance in providing the:

Richmond West Primary School: Cultural Awareness Programme, 1983.

(21) James A. Banks, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, 3rd edition, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1983, pp. 20-21.

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New South Wales Department of Education:

"Multicultural Education: A Consultative Document"
Sydney, 1978.

Multicultural Education Policy Statement and Support Documents.

(a) Multicultural Perspectives to Curriculum.

(b) Intercultural Education.

(c) Community Language Education.

(d) Ethnic Studies.

(e) English as a Second Language Education.

Sydney, 1983.

Queensland Department of Education:

Education for a Multicultural Society: Curriculum Guidelines for Primary Schools (Social Studies).
Brisbane, 1983.

Education for a Multicultural Society: A Resource List.
Brisbane, 1983.

Tasmanian Department of Education:

MATE: Multicultural Approaches in Tasmanian Education.
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Melbourne, 1983.

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